

BW 328

M3R4

W. Mawer on Privileges of
Dissenters, &c.

Lincoln, 1810.

June 16th

Reply to Rev^o W. Letts attack

DW328
M3R4

Wes. 13/2

W.M.

A

REPLY

TO

SEVERAL LETTERS ON THE PRIVILEGES, &c.

OF

DISSENTERS ;

WRITTEN AND SENT TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD A.B.C.&c.

By the Rev. W. HETT, Prebendary of Lincoln,

IN

TWO LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THAT GENTLEMAN.

By Wm. MAWER.

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just ; but his neighbour cometh
and searcheth him. —— *SOLomon.*

LINCOLN,

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AND ALL THE BOOKSELLERS.

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BW 328

M 3 R 4

Wes. 1312

LETTER I.

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING purchased, and read with some attention, your letters, "Written and sent to the right honourable lord A. B. C. &c." I take the liberty to suggest to you my apprehension, that this noble lord, when he sees your letters laid before the public, will not be quite so well pleased and quiescent as he seems to have been during the time of your actual correspondence with him. I can assure you, sir, from what I have seen and known of this gentleman, although of a most peaceable and quiet disposition, when truly, honestly, and honourably treated, yet, when unjustly and disgracefully employed as a vehicle to convey trash, misrepresentation, and downright falsehood, he is not without a proper spirit to correct the errors of those who are so fool-hardy as to prostitute the use of him to such vile purposes. I can assure you, sir, I should not have thought of employing your honourable friend, A. B. C. &c. against you, had I not thought it very probable that your logical and rhetorical letters might fall into the hands of some who might not be able altogether to judge how far several of the particulars contained in them are true or false. I do not intend, sir, in my observations, to follow you throughall the windings of your very fruitful imagination, but only to point out to you some particular passages wherein you seem to have laboured under either the grossest ignorance or the most violent prejudice, or both.

Having passed through your whimsical title page, your address to his sacred majesty, the house of commons, and to the reader, which takes up no less than eight pages of this admirable work, and which, I believe, will be esteemed by most of your readers as the most valuable part of it, I come to your first letter; on the second page of which you produce your humble plea for an indulgent hearing: "The only plea which I can advance for an indulgent hearing is, that I have been more than thirty years a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have, during that time, taken some pains to make myself acquainted with what it is my duty to know." Although it is not, perhaps, very easy to guess what you have learned in the course of these thirty years, yet your letters may sufficiently convince those who read them what you have not learned. I think, sir, it is pretty plain that you have not learned to treat those who think it right to differ from you in matters of religion with that candour and fair dealing which every denomination of professing christians (whatever their religious principles may be), are entitled to, and what they most certainly have a right to expect, particularly, from one who professes himself to have been for "thirty years a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

On the same page you tell your readers, that the "established system of religious worship is supposed, by the generality of those who profess and adhere to it, to approach as near to the real truth made known in the gospel, as, perhaps, the infirmity of human nature will admit;" and the consequence arising from this hypothesis is, that all the "several

“several tolerated ones recede from the truth of christianity in different measures, and a variety of degrees.” And because they who profess and adhere to this system of religious worship, think it “approaches as near to the real truth made known in the gospel, as perhaps the infirmity of human nature will admit.” Will it follow from thence, that it really is so ; and justify your inference, “that all the several tolerated ones recede from the truth of christianity, in different measures, and a variety of degrees ? Why, sir, there is not a dissenter, or a professor of religion, under the heavens, that does not believe the very same, concerning his own creed or system of religious worship.—Ask a Roman catholic or a protestant ; ask a presbyterian, a baptist, a calvinist, a quaker, or a methodist ; and will not each and every one of their answers be uniformly the same, namely, “we think that our system of religion approaches as near to the real truth made known in the gospel, as, perhaps, the infirmity of human nature will admit.”

Thus, sir, you have seven systems, all of them the best systems in the world ; and by the same rule of reasoning it will follow, that all those who differ from them “recede from the truth of christianity in different measures, and a variety of degrees.” Indeed, sir, as long as there is a single spark of honesty or sincerity in the heart of man, it must, in the very nature of things, be so. Whenever a man becomes dissatisfied with his opinions in religious matters, he will, as an honest and conscientious man, relinquish them, and embrace those which he thinks more congenial to the truths of the gospel.

As to your charity, in wishing the dissenters to enjoy their present privileges, under the toleration act, there will be found

found sufficient reason to call it in question. I charitably hope there is not a denomination of protestant dissenters in the united kingdom, but who feel deeply penetrated with heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God, and our most gracious sovereign, for the liberties they enjoy. But, sir, there is too much reason to fear that if the power was once vested in the hands of some of his majesty's subjects, that liberty would not be long enjoyed by them ; although it would not be very difficult to prove, that liberty of conscience is every man's own birth-right, and as such that he should enjoy it, is consistent with the laws both of nature and of God. If so, to deprive him of that liberty, that spiritual birth-right, which he enjoys by the toleration act, (under the mild government of his most gracious majesty,) by repealing that act, or by making any other, would be a flagrant breach of the laws both of nature and of God.

I now, sir, come to your second letter, in which you take into consideration the means by which the dissenters may be prevented from doing any injury to the constitution ; but, sir, until you have fully proved that they either have already done, or are likely to do some injury to the constitution, I must beg permission to leave you on that subject, for it is a well-known maxim, ' where there is no disease, there needs no cure.'

The second thing you wish, is that they (the dissenting teachers,) may be more properly qualified to instruct their hearers. But, here, sir, you have left the point at large ; for you have not told us what qualifications are necessary for a preacher of the gospel, and if you had, it is highly probable the dissenters would not be of your mind ; for as many of

them differ from you in both doctrine and church government, it is very likely that they would differ from you also in their opinions concerning the necessary qualifications of their teachers. On this subject, I am bold to say, that the dissenting congregations are as well satisfied, and have cause to be as well satisfied with their teachers, as the members of the established church are with theirs.

We are told, page the 8th, that when a dissenting teacher, or one professing to be such, has taken the oaths required of him by the toleration act, he is "exempted from serving on any jury, or from being chosen, or appointed to bear the office of church-warden, overseer of the poor, or of any other office whatever, and also from serving in the militia." Now, sir, are you not a little mistaken as to the extent of privilege granted to those persons who take the oaths. Whatever has been the case in times past, I think you will find, that those exemptions only apply now to such persons as are wholly employed in the work of the ministry, and not to those who carry on any trade, or are employed in any secular business. And pray, sir, have not dissenting teachers, who are wholly employed in the work of the ministry, and faithfully discharge the duties of it, as great a right to those exemptions, as the regular clergy? But, allowing all you have said to be correct, concerning the privileges and exemptions granted by the toleration act to those who take the oaths, I can inform you of one denomination of dissenters, and by far the largest that is known in England, I mean the Wesleyan methodists, who have made a sufficient stand against any abuse of the toleration

leration act, in that respect. As I presume, sir, you are not in the habit of reading the minutes of the methodist conferences, I will transcribe the rule at large : it was made at the methodist conference, held at Manchester, in the year 1803.

“ Question 14th.—What is the opinion of the conference concerning the resolutions passed in the quarterly meeting, held for the London circuit, on the 30th of last December, of which, with the introduction, the following is a copy ? (Copy.) “ It was stated, that several private individuals had, in various parts of the kingdom, obtained licences for preaching, under the toleration act, and had abused the privilege of such licences, by claiming exemption from civil and military offices ; to the manifest prejudice of their fellow-citizens, to the injury of the state, and to the great scandal of religion. In order therefore, to suppress such practices, as much as lies in this meeting, and to prevent improper persons from becoming preachers or teachers,

Resolved unanimously, 1st. That if any member of the methodist society, in this circuit, apply to the quarter sessions for a licence to preach, without being approved as a preacher, by the quarter meeting, as expressed by the seventh section of the larger minutes of the methodist conference, printed in 1797, such person shall be expelled the society.

2dly. That if any member of the methodist society in this circuit, who may have already obtained a licence contrary to the last resolution, shall attempt to claim any exemption from office, by virtue of such licence, such person shall be expelled from the society.

3dly. That it is the opinion of this meeting, that the regularly appointed local preachers, or persons who preach occasionally, and follow trades or other callings, are a very useful

useful and valuable body of men, but as they are not wholly set apart for the work of the ministry, it is not considered to be consistent with the spirit of the toleration act, that they should claim any advantage from the licences in question.

4th. That the above resolutions be printed in the methodist magazine, and circulated generally throughout the methodist connection.

Signed, by order of the meeting,

JOSEPH BENSON, Chairman.

JOSEPH BUTTERWORTH,

Secretary to the quarterly meeting.

Answer.—“ We highly approve of these resolutions, and do agree, and are determined to adopt them, and to inforce them throughout the whole connection.”

I have before me another rule, on the same subject, made at the methodist conference, held at Manchester, in the year 1809.

Question.—“ It is said that improper persons have applied for licences to preach: how may this be best prevented?

Answer.—“ Any person who applies for a licence, without the previous knowledge and consent of the superintendant, and his colleagues, and of the local preachers, or quarterly meeting of the circuit, in which he resides, shall not be suffered to preach among us.”

Now, sir, had you known these rules of the methodists, it might have saved both you and me some trouble; as they must in a satisfactory manner, prove to any unprejudiced person that the methodists are determined that among them, no improper person, in their estimation, shall apply for licences;

and

and that those who obtain them, shall make no improper use of the qualification.

I have been acquainted with the local preachers for twenty years, but never knew a single individual attempt to take any improper advantage of the toleration act; nor, sir, do I believe, after all the diligent search you have made, that you have found one of the methodist connection who, having obtained a licence to preach, has either refused to serve in any parish office, or in the militia.

I am aware, sir, that the quotations I have made, and what I have said, only go so far as to clear the methodists, in this particular; but as your principal charges seem solely levelled against that denomination of dissenters, I shall satisfy myself with vindicating their discipline and conduct, against the foul aspersions, and unjust charges which you have brought against them. Although I have not a doubt in my own mind, but that the principal part of the charges which may apply to other denominations of dissenters, are equally unfounded in truth.

I find on the 19th page, that you have attacked us with a whole volley of slander and falsehood—

“ A silly boy, an idle, an ignorant, a profligate mechanic, or day-labourer, without any religious information, or any real attachment to what is good : by the payment of one shilling, after gabbling over an oath or two, respecting the true purport of which he cares little, and making a declaration, the real meaning of which he knows not at all; is empowered to sally forth in quest of spiritual adventures,

among

among the lower orders of the people. And if he be inspired, as he may have the vanity to suppose himself to be, he cannot possibly be inspired by any thing, except by a super-abundant stock of ignorance and impudence."

A very heavy fire—a very loud report: but the mark is missed,—no execution is done.

I ask you, sir, where this "silly boy, this idle, ignorant, profligate mechanic, without any attachment to what is good," is to be found? Can you, sir, inform me, or the world, where any person answering to this character is to be met with, "sallying forth in quest of spiritual adventures," as you sarcastically express it. I believe not; nor do I think such a person is any where to be found, except in the wild sallies of your own "silly" imagination.—You think, sir, however, you have found one; for you say that you know him very well. "A boy, at the age of sixteen, commenced a preacher of the word, continued this sacred employment for two or three years, &c." I also very well know the young man you allude to, but never knew him to be a preacher. The truth is simply this: The young man was in the methodist society, two or three years. He sometimes prayed in public, and occasionally went into the country villages to assist in holding prayer meetings; but never considered himself a preacher, nor was he ever employed as such by the methodists; nor should I ever have supposed he could have been deemed a preacher, except by persons who know no difference between preaching and praying. And thus it frequently happens,

that when a young man has prayed a few times in public, he is, by the ignorant, called a preacher.

As to the other case of the young man who applied to the magistrates of Stafford, for a licence, you have furnished me with an answer. You tell your reader, page 48, how "effectually the principles and the practices of christianity are circulated by means of an established ministry, and that if any should remain ignorant of any part of their christian duty, and wish to have the fullest information respecting it, they have an opportunity of getting their ignorance removed, by frequenting their parish churches, or by applying to their respective ministers."—Now, sir, how can you tell but that this young man might have by these means "obtained the most perfect knowledge both of the principles and practice of christianity."—Such knowledge, sir, I conceive to be the best and most essential that a minister of Christ can possibly possess; and if the young man had by these means acquired it himself, why might he not be able to communicate it to others.

I am, myself, personally acquainted with two ministers of the gospel who are blind, and have been so from their birth, and yet know much more of the sacred scriptures, and the principles of christianity, than the author of these letters seems to know, if they are a fair sample of his information. I have heard one of them myself address, with considerable ability, a congregation of near three thousand persons, and I have no doubt but these men have had more seals to their ministry than numbers who, on account of their want of sight, might be led to despise their labours. I mention this

as a proof, that it is possible a person may be called "to preach that gospel which he cannot read." But if the young man in question was really as ignorant and as vain as he is represented to have been, I am fully satisfied that his conduct would not be sanctioned by any respectable body of dissenters whatever.

To cure all those evils at once, you have proposed a number of regulations too tedious to mention here; a few of them shall suffice—as the whole may be seen by paying two shillings for your letters: "Before any young man should have a licence granted to him to preach the gospel, sufficient notice of his intention to apply for one should be sent to the chairman of the quarter sessions. A certificate of his age, the title upon which he is to be admitted a preacher, proof of examination, and approbation; and also, letters testimonial of his good life and behaviour for three years antecedent to his offering himself a candidate, signed by three well known and respectable inhabitants of the parishes in which he has resided *."

As these regulations are pretty harmless, and the most essential parts of them already attended to in substance by the methodists, (as appears from the minutes of the methodist conferences), I shall leave them until they are likely to come under the consideration of the legislature. But there is

another

* I am much afraid that if every candidate for holy orders was obliged to have such a recommendation when he goes before the bishop, a great many would be found wanting that now wear black cloth, and enjoy fat livings.

another act of parliament which you particularly wish to have passed, the substance of which is as follows : “If any dissenter, whether a minister or one of the people, shall, hereafter, knowingly and wilfully, either directly or indirectly, by writing, or by word of mouth, or in any other way whatever, say, or do any thing which shall bring into disrepute or endanger the constitution, or shall by the same disparage or lower the character of the regular clergy, so as to lessen them in the estimation of the people, he, she, or they, shall, on conviction of such offence, be liable to a certain punishment.”

Query—Should there not be another act of parliament made to prevent clergymen of the established church from speaking and writing against dissenters, and scandalously misrepresenting their conduct? If such an act had passed twelve months ago, I think, sir, you would have been “ liable to a certain punishment.” It is my opinion that the legislature has something else of a much more important nature to attend to, than the childish whims of the Rev. Wm. Hett.

But how is it, good sir, that you seem so much alarmed? Who are they, and what are they, of whom you seem so much afraid? Are they men of great talents, profound learning, immense riches, respectable connections, and almost unlimited power? Nay, the very reverse of all this; for we are told that their leaders are only a few “ taylors, weavers, shoemakers, and the lowest mechanics,” concerning whom there is such a dreadful outcry, and from whom both church and state are said to be in danger. Is there not, think you, sir, as much danger of the lion being devoured by the lamb.—A

child

child might perceive the inconsistency of such slanderous insinuations. From your letters it is easy to perceive that the local preachers among the methodists have long been a source of uneasiness to you; and you certainly have poured out upon them an abundant flood of contempt. But, notwithstanding all the bitter and contemptuous things you have written, their names and their labours will be remembered with pleasure by thousands when your's are forgotten. Hundreds of these honest men, whom you so much despise, after labouring hard for the support of themselves and families six days in the week, on the seventh travel, either on horseback or on foot, from ten to twenty miles, and frequently preach twice or three times. The number of miles that many of them travel in one year cannot be less than from five to six hundred. I have, myself, as a local preacher, within the last twelve years, travelled on Sundays, partly on horseback and partly on foot, upon a fair calculation, not less than 6000 miles, and like the rest of my brethren in that office, without either fee or reward, or hope thereof, in this life. You will probably answer and say, what do all their travelling and labour amount to, if (through their ignorance) no good is done?*

But,

* It is generally acknowledged that what a man knows himself he may communicate to others, according to the capacity he has of conveying his ideas, and the capacity of those under his instruction to receive them. Hence, the husbandman can teach husbandry, the mechanic mechanism, the tradesmen his own trade, the mathematician mathematics, and the philosopher philosophy. And if so, why may not one that is unacquainted with the higher branches of literature, yet possessing the knowledge of the leading doctrines of the gospel, such as the fall of man, the universal depravity of human nature, the redemption of the world by our Lord

But, sir, not only are the labours of these men to be traced, but, blessed be God, their usefulness too. Hundreds of poor souls have, by their instrumentality, been brought out of darkness

Jesus Christ, and the gift of the holy Ghost ; and also of those doctrines which relate to man's experience and practice ; such as repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, love to God and man, together with universal holiness of heart and life,—teach these truths to others. Now, these doctrines of the gospel the local preachers are in a good degree acquainted with, both in theory and also by experience. They are acquainted with the doctrine of repentance, for they have repented ; with the doctrine of faith for, they have believed ; and with the doctrine of the love of God, for it is shed abroad in their hearts. And this love of God, and of Christ, constrains them zealously and affectionately to go out into the “ high-ways and hedges,” and if possible to compel sinners to repent, and turn to God. It is certain that many of them make no pretensions to learning ; their discourses may have many defects, both as to composition and grammatical accuracy ; but notwithstanding these defects they are frequently plain, forcible, and affecting ; and I am satisfied that the nearer a preacher can come to the common dialect of those whom he is addressing, the better he will be understood, and the more he will be likely to profit his congregation. What do three-fourths of the congregations that ministers, whether in the church or out of it, have to address, know about the purity of language, the subtlety of metaphysical reasoning, or the exact composition of a sermon. God forbid that I should despise human learning, when it is well employed ; I know that without it, in a certain measure, there could not be even civilization, man would be both wild and savage. But I am, at the same time, well persuaded, that if the regularly established ministers would condescend to stoop a little lower, so as to meet the capacities of their hearers, their labours would be much more useful. One reason, among many more, that the methodist preachers, both local and itinerant, have been so very useful, is, that their discourses in general are plain and experimental, so that the hearers perceive their own different characters strikingly pourtrayed,—the human heart in all its native depravity and sinfulness laid open. The sinner hears, as from Mount Sinai, “ cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them.” And the true penitent, as from the uplifted cross, “ Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Their labours have been blessed, particularly among the poor working people in large manufacturing and mercantile towns, as well as in a number of country villages. If it should be asked, "what sort of reformation is it that has taken place?" I answer, drunkards have become sober, adulterers have become chaste, liars have learned to speak the truth, Sabbath breakers have been taught to keep that day holy, and hundreds of families that, through the wickedness of their parents, were half famished and covered with rags, now live in the enjoyment of plenty. These, sir, are the fruits of the labour of these local preachers, of which there are hundreds of living witnesses. But you must rise from your easy cushion in the church, and say these are only poor people—and are not the souls of the poor as valuable as the souls of the rich? They were in the estimation of our adorable Redeemer: "blessed are the poor; for they have the gospel preached to them." I am much afraid, sir, that what has been said of the labours and usefulness of these men whom you condemn, as ignorant and vain, cannot be said with truth of many of your learned doctors of divinity, who receive from £500 to £5000 per annum.

You tell us that you cannot discern what advantage can possibly arise from the methodist's system of itinerancy. Perhaps not; nor can you possibly discern what advantage can arise from any other system of theirs, or from the systems of any dissenting denomination whatever; for, according to your notions, "they all recede from the truth of christianity

in different measures, and a variety of degrers." But will it follow, sir, that because you (who are blinded by prejudice) cannot see the advantage, that no one else can? There is one advantage which the congregations have that attend their ministry, according to your own information, that the congregations which attend the established church have not. "I am creditably informed that those who are accustomed to hear them (that is the methodists) are frequently known to comfort themselves, by saying, 'Well, this is but an indifferent preacher to be sure, but the next may be better.' This, sir, is a consolation indeed, and a consolation that your congregations cannot boast of. For if the pastor appointed by the bishop be ever so dronish, or ever so wicked, (which you know is not very uncommon) they, dear hearts, have no alternative between him (bad as he may be) and none. So that they sighing may say, "ours is a poor parson (he very often gets *fresh*, poor man); * but we have no other." Such reverend gentlemen as these, sir, were well known in the days of that excellent poet, W. Cowper, esq. and most strikingly pourtrayed in his inimitable time-picce, to which I refer you, and am,

Reverend sir,

Yours, &c.

WILLIAM MAWER.

Lincoln, June 12, 1810.

* This does not apply to the Rev. Wm. Hett, neither is it applicable to numbers of the clergy of the established church, many of whom are worthy of the highest esteem.

LETTER II.

REVEREND SIR,

You ask the question, "would you then have all the dissenting teachers set aside, &c. Your reply is, " by no means ; for as the foot in the bodily frame is thought to be inferior in point of situation to the heart and the head, still has its use, and is indispensable to the comfort and the proper enjoyment of the whole man : so do I conceive the inferior orders of the dissenting teachers have their use." We are thus informed in what situation we stand in the church ; an humble one to be sure, but yet very useful.

This acknowledgment is wonderfully illustrated by a bungling story about an "*Hedge-doctor*", which one would have thought, had not your name, sir, been at the end of it, must have been put together (so badly does it fit) by an *hedge-carpenter*, or if there is any divinity in it, by an *hedge-divine* ; for you tell us that although this " ignorant pretender, this hedge-doctor, renders a dislocated limb utterly incurable by the extreme violence of the means taken to reduce it; and often has brought a sore to a mortification, by a forcible and premature attempt to heal it : Yet, notwithstanding all this, the simple patient is apt to estimate the excellence of the means adopted to restore him to health and soundness, by the quantity of pain and smart he has endured." What, sir, when there is a mortification and the patient is incurable ? This is won-

derful indeed. Hear it all ye starved, untaught doctors, and be glad: if you wish your fame to go abroad, see that you give plenty of pain to your patients.—Never mind bringing on a mortification, or causing a limb to be incurable; for remember that your fame is sure to be estimated by the quantity of pain you give.

I should advise you, sir, to make no more figures. Bad, however, as this comparision is, you are determined to carry it forward; for you tell us it is precisely the same in the cure of the disorders of the mind; for such “numbness and insensibility of mind prevails among the lower, that is the labouring, classes of the community, that you may reason with them upon the excellence and blessedness of a life of holiness, and the baseness and misery of a life of wickedness: explain all this to them, as fully and as frequently as you will, in a cool and quiet manner, in soft and moderate terms; let what you say be ever so true or ever so just, they go to sleep; you preach to stocks and stones.” But “thunder into their ears the unutterable woes of hell-fire and damnation; apprize them that the devil is at their elbow, and that he will instantly fly away with them if they do not repent and lead a new life, they then think you are in earnest, you awaken them from their lethargy, and they listen with attention. It is highly probable, that by this mode of treatment, if by any at all, you may bring them to a just sense of their duty, and reform them.”

Now, sir, as this is perfectly new to me, having never heard this sort of preaching in my life; and as it is probably

also

also new to most of the regular clergy, it is very likely they may not see all at once into the utility of it. And again, as it would be a very dangerous doctrine indeed for itinerant and local preachers to deal in, being only comparable to "Hedge-doctors," I think you had better take it entirely into your own judicious hands, and sound abroad, in every parish where you go, and thunder into every parishoner's ears, (except they are too rich) "The devil is at their elbow, and that he will instantly fly away with them, if they do not repent." As this is a perfectly new mode of preaching to sinners, and entirely of your own inventing, you shall, by my consent, have the credit of *all the reformation* that is effected by it.

But, sir, you now begin to be very grave indeed ; and after so strongly recommending plain and faithful preaching to your brethren the clergy, (for which I fear they will not thank you,) you come to lay before your readers, the dreadful effects of such preaching, in a conventicle. Pray, sir, what is the difference between plain and affecting preaching in the church, and plain and affecting preaching in a chapel.

We come now to a serious charge. You charge the methodists with a very capital crime; as such we shall request a fair hearing. The substance of your story runs thus: "A young man of the name of C. Mumby, of Lincoln, went with a young woman, a fellow servant of his, to the house of a methodist, where was a methodist preacher, who, without ceremony, told him to his face, *that he could not be saved but that he was certainly damned to all eternity.* The young man, in his own words, jumped up as high as the house ; he

probably

probably felt a sensation as if he had done so. He did really start in an upright direction, and was instantly seized with insanity, which continued about a year and an half. He was sent to the York Asylum, stayed some time, came home, and is now well. During his malady, and since his recovery, he invariably attributes all the misery he has endured to the rude assault of the methodist preacher." Cruel and wicked indeed, if true : that it is not true, we have sufficient proof.

The real state of the case is simply this :—The young man had been in a state of derangement some days, on account of some circumstance of a disagreeable nature which had happened to him. He professed to a young woman, a methodist, who lived in the same family with him, to be in very great distress of mind, on account of some very heinous sins which he supposed he had committed ; such as that of having killed his mother, (a plain proof that he was deranged, as the circumstance had not happened). The young woman brought him with her to the house of one of our friends ; the methodist minister being there, the young man desired to be prayed for, often repeating, "I have killed my mother ;" and shewing other evident marks of insanity. The minister, to indulge his conceit, prayed with him. During the time of prayer he became still more agitated, jumped up from his knees, and made use of many strange expressions. The minister, and others who were present, requested him to endeavour to compose his mind, and go home, which he did very soon after. But that any such sentence as "that he could not be saved, but that he was damned to all eternity," was ever made use of,

of, or any other expression of a like nature was ever uttered, either by the minister or any o'her person present, is as absolute an untruth as was ever published to the world.

I am very glad to hear from you, sir, that the young man has so far recovered his senses; but it is a matter of doubt with many whether he be yet perfectly restored to his reason or not. However that may be, you have ventured to take your information from him, and publish it to the world. I, sir, have my information from several steady, respectable, and sober-minded persons, on whose testimony I can, with the greatest confidence rely; and could very readily mention names if it were necessary. Permit me to tell you, sir, that the methodist preachers, whether local or itinerant, as ignorant as you suppose them to be, know better how and when to apply the threatenings than your absurd story would insinuate. They know that, to the flagrant and hardened sinner, the heaviest threatenings belong; but to the convinced sinner, the true penitent, the most pleasing and encouraging promises.

I know it is the opinion of some that religion is, of all things, most calculated to make its votaries mad; but such a notion certainly must, in the very nature of things, be the most ridiculous and absurd. What can possibly be more calculated, even under the severest trials and calamities, to raise, support, sooth, and cheer the mind, than true religion, which is an experimental knowledge of the favour of God; the love of God, and the love of man, in all their various branches and blessings! And yet if any person, professing to

be

be religious, happens to be afflicted with mental derangement; religion is blamed, or methodism, or, perhaps, some other *ism*.

One reason for this may be, that most patients labouring under this disease, feeling their minds sometimes oppressed, and sometimes distracted, talk much about religion. Sometimes they are overshadowed with gloomy fears, and dreadful forebodings of future misery; and sometimes transported almost to rapture, according to the nature or effects of the disease. Hence it is that in many cases of mental derangement the blame is saddled on religion, or on some religious profession; whereas in most cases, if not all, that derangement would have existed if religion had never been known.

Another most serious charge I had almost forgotten: It is a charge of disaffection to government, expressed in these words: "But since that time," namely, when the toleration act was passed, "an abundant crop of protestant dissenters, of various kinds and of discordant principles, has sprung up, and are daily springing up among us; too many of whom, I am sorry to be under the necessity of saying, how much or how little they may differ from the established church, or from one another in a variety of circumstances are of the same mind in one,—that is, an unfriendly disposition towards the constitution in church and state as by law established, and an unremitting and incessant endeavour to extrude into it their own changes and amendments at the least, if not utterly to overthrow and destroy it." If all you have said, sir, concerning this abundant crop of dissenters can be proved, it

may

may certainly be compared to a crop of tares, and deserves to be pulled up by the roots.

I will however, examine some of the facts by which this charge is intended to be proved: The first which presents itself is Dr. Priestley's gun-powder plot, for blowing up church and state. *Query*—would not Guy Faux's gun-powder plot have answered your purpose full as well. You have certainly as good authority to put into the hands of every dissenter the gun-powder plot of the one as of the other. There are more than one or two denominations of dissenters, who most cordially detest Dr. Priestley's principles, both religious and political; and, sir, have you not sense to know, and ingenuity enough to acknowledge, that there always was, and perhaps ever will be, a number of persons unfriendly to the constitution, in the established church, as well as in the dissenting societies.

Your second proof is, that "Paine's Age of Reason and Rights of Man, made their way into one of your parishes, by means of dissenting teachers." Are you sure of that? Perhaps you are mistaken. And if you are not, pray what does it prove? Surely not that all dissenting teachers of every denomination are lovers of those books, or hold the sentiments contained in them. You might probably be the first person who introduced Paine's Age of Reason into your own family; but will it thence follow that you approve the sentiments of that wicked author. Nay, sir, I hope not. I hope you detest them altogether. Thousands of persons of all denominations read those vile works out of curiosity; and thousands of persons,

even

even dissenters, would rejoice to see them all in flames. A man that loves his bible and his God can never love Paine's works ; and I trust you will grant that there are some dissenters who love both their bible, their God, and their king.

The third proof of the truth of your charge is, that " during the late contest, for a member of parliament between A, the present sitting member, and B, the unsuccessful candidate, every dissenter, of every description, and of the most repugnant persuasion, voted for A, and against B. Roman catholics, antinomians, methodists, unitarians, &c. &c."

This is not true, sir ; I am well acquainted with two methodists, at least, in Lincoln, who neither gave their votes nor interest in favour of A, and that from political principles too ; whether right or wrong has nothing to do with the question. But if you were not mistaken in what you say concerning the whole of the dissenters voting for A ; if you allow, as you do, " that the supporters of A might be the friends of the constitution of the church and state," in that case, it proves neither one thing nor another. But as it seems to be one of your *strongest* arguments for proving your point, we will give it fair play ; it shall have another chance.

Shall we suppose then that all the freemen that voted for the successful candidate A were disaffected or unfriendly to the constitution ; you cannot calculate on a larger proportion of dissenters than one to five, out of the number of freemen who voted for A, i. e. one dissenter to five members of the established church. If so, then I am afraid it will prove too much ; for I think it will prove pretty clearly that there are

five freemen in the established church, unfriendly to the constitution, to one free dissenter. Any person may perceive, sir, by this time, what poor shifts you have been put to in attempting to prove this point, namely, *that all the dissenters are unfriendly to the constitution.* I can compare your childish arguments on this subject, to nothing but the last fruitless efforts of a drowning man, who will gladly catch at the slenderest twig, to keep him from sinking. Your hypothesis is not to be proved, sir, either by you, or any one else : many have tried to prove it before you, and with just the same success.

There are thousands, sir, of dissenters, and tens of thousands, who most cordially love their king and their country too ; and fervently and affectionately pray for both, and I trust, that day will never dawn, when they will do otherwise. If you had known any thing of the methodists, you would have known that politics are no part of their religion ; but that to fear God, and honour the king, is one of their leading principles. But, sir, you began your book with your head in a mist, and I am afraid you will not get it out until the last page is found.

We come now to two most notorious instances of depravity and wickedness ; the one happened many years ago : but say you, " I have a memorial of it written by myself, nearly at the time when it happened ;" and, O sir, why did not you publish it to the world sooner ; how could you suffer a thing of such importance to mankind, to lie dormant so long, in your memorandum book ; however, one would hope, sir, that you have treasured up many such like anecdotes in this

sacred repository, the memorandum book, and that they will soon make their appearance in the world, for the good of mankind. The crime is of such a delicate nature, that really, I feel rather at a loss how to express myself on the subject ; but sir, I think if I make use of your diction, I cannot be far wrong. A poor old baptist minister, very infirm, but an harmless old man, over whom you have exhausted all your rhetoric, while he was walking in the cathedral, (having had a most unpleasant and painful disorder upon him for many years) happened to feel the imperious demand of nature, and was constrained to do against one of the “ pillars of that sacred edifice, what a dog is often seen to do against a nettle.” It was certainly an indecent action, and could not be justified, if done by a person in health ; but then, sir, you will find from his apology, that it was not the poor man’s crime, but his misfortune ; for it is certain, there is no law against necessity. But, sir, who, beside yourself, would have committed so ludicrous a circumstance to the press.— There can be no doubt, however, but that it will cause much more laughter than weeping ; and I cannot help wondering, that the noble lord, to whom you addressed your letters, did not laugh heartily.

The second instance of notable depravity is related on the following page, viz. 40th ; as follows :—“ The circumstance took place during the time of the district meeting, of the methodists, about six months ago. “ A clergyman, who like myself, officiates in the weekly service, happened to be passing through the cathedral, when he was surprised to see

five or six respectably looking men, in the habit, and with the appearance of clergymen, deliberately and purposely wearing their hats, in this sacred and venerable edifice. He remonstrated with them on such impropriety of behaviour; but they took not the least notice of what he said. He then insisted that they must either pull off their hats, or walk out of the church; upon this reasonable and pressing demand, they all uncovered their heads, except one, who did not chuse to do so, because, forsooth, like the holy baptist's friend, he 'was afraid of taking cold.' "

And did not you know, sir, that the methodists think it no crime to walk in their own chapels, (which they think are as sacred as the cathedral) with their hats on, except in the time of divine service; and do you not know that the society of friends, commonly called quakers, do not uncover at all, even in their public meetings; and yet I dare say, that the honest friends think their meeting houses are equally as sacred as the cathedral; and I am inclined to think you would have some trouble to controvert their opinion. But to proceed: "These two circumstances put together, will convince your lordships beyond the possibility of a doubt, after what I shall tell you concerning myself, that there must be a very material difference between the attic story of a dissenting teacher, and that of an established clergyman; and that the one is covered in with much more flimsy and more penetrable materials than the other. I have been now engaged, for almost thirty years, in doing the weekly duty of the cathedral, at all seasons of the year, in the bitterest weather, and I do not

know

know that ever, during all this time, I perceived any inconvenience as to my head, though not shielded by the interposition of a wig, from the coldness of the edifice ; whereas, if a dissenting minister, let him be of what persuasion he will, baptist or methodist, does but once set his foot within these sacred walls, his ~~blessed~~ pate is immediately seized by the extreme chillness of the surrounding atmosphere, and he is obliged, whether he will or no, to keep on his hat ; I suppose, least his brain should be congealed, and the sinful world should be deprived thereby of the transcendant benefit of his future labours." This, sir, is most sublime ! But what inference shall I draw from it ? why, sir, as I can think of nothing else, it must be this, that you are blessed with a good constitution, and that your brains are happily inclosed in a thicker skull than those of most dissenters.

On the subject of better information, page 42, your readers are informed by you that " with regard to the preachments of the lower orders of mechanics, taylors, shoemakers, weavers, and of all other day labourers, I must freely and candidly profess that I am utterly unacquainted with their excellencies or their defects " Then, sir, you have said a great deal about what you know nothing of. If you know nothing, certainly you should have said nothing : and here, sir, we are presented with another of your grand comparisons, and there must, I should think, be very profound wisdom in it ; but it lies so very deep that my shallow capacity cannot reach it. However, I understand thus much that you are very fond of a " Yorkshire broad-cloth coat, and you think it the best coat

that

that a thorough-bred Englishman can possibly wear." All very good, sir, although some men might find an objection to your taste, and affirm that a good west of England broad is much better, I will leave you to the full enjoyment of your "old fashioned taste," and it certainly is of great *importance* to the world to know it. But I find another coat, even a coat of many colours. I hope I shall be excused the trouble of transcribing the whole history of this coat, as it takes up nearly a page and a half of valuable paper—it will be found in page 43. When a coat is once made, although it be a fool's coat, it certainly should be worn. I have been looking out for a length of time, sir, for some one whom it might fit, but I really cannot find any person willing to put it on.—However, it is a pity it should be lost, and as it is the rare production of your own ingenuity, and put together by your own all-forming hands, I would recommend to you to keep it for your own use, and wear it as occasion may require.

Leaving the coat—you proceed to an old controverted point, between the calvinists and arminians, concerning which there has been much more written than deserves reading. I have no particular objection to your comment on the passage of scripture in question, but I certainly think you have injured the calvinists by misrepresenting their creed.—They are, doubtless, better qualified to speak to this point than I am, as they best know what they, as a body, believe. I have read some of their works, and have conversed with some of the members of their society, but never understood that they esteem all piety, charity, and temperance, to be

equally

equally as detestable in the sight of God as the grossest sins. And I think, sir, you will find that although the calvinists totally disclaim all merit arising from any good work whatever, yet that they connect good works with their faith, and are labouring to be found walking in them. But as I do not profess to believe exactly as they do, I shall leave this point; only, I love to see justice done; I do not like to hear the doctrines of any denomination of professing christians made to speak a different language from that which they intend them.

Page 47 — The dissenters are taught to be more humble-minded, but in what way I really cannot understand. I am surprised, sir, that you who have had a classical education should preserve no more order in your writing, and that you should not keep closer to the different points in question. I declare I do not know where there is a taylor, shoemaker, weaver, or low mechanic of any description that would more grossly depart from his subject, and from sound reasoning, than you do. As soon as you have mentioned this most interesting subject of humility, on which I hoped to see something very profitable, the reader is led, as fast as your volatile thoughts and pen can carry him, to your old favourite theme of slander and misrepresentation, with which your letters so richly abound: and you think you will have another round with the travelling preachers. “Should these travelling preachers and their advocates fancy, as some of them have publicly asserted, that they are inspired, that they are endued with power from on high, in the manner of their predecessors the apostles of Jesus Christ; and that therefore they are

better

better qualified than are the regular ministry, who pretend to no such preternatural powers, &c. Then they should have given proof of this inspiration, by the working of miracles; then, and not till then, will their pretensions be credited."

The travelling preachers do not say, that they are better qualified to preach the gospel, than the regular ministry; they know that among the regular ministers of the established church, there are many, both very able and pious men—men, who will not, like you, ostentatiously renounce the doctrine of divine inspiration; but, who, most sincerely pray for, and are directed by, the Spirit's influence. And, sir, however you may now be above the teaching of the holy spirit; the travelling preachers humbly acknowledge they are not. And I think it is not many years since you, sir, was humble enough to acknowledge and declare to the bishop, that you was moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon you the office of a minister.

If it were not too serious a subject, one might step aside and ask, sir, what moved you the most powerfully at that time. Was it real love to precious and immortal souls, or a desire only to get a good living in the church? As you have lost sight of one of the grand and leading doctrines of the established church, so very soon; there is much reason to fear it was the latter.

You think, sir, that divine inspiration is confined to the working of miracles; and that the working of miracles, is the only sufficient proof of divine inspiration. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant it, and examine you on that point.—

And

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And

And pray, sir, when you professed to be moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon you the office of a minster, did you work miracles? O no; you reply,—miracles!—miracles have ceased:—then, sir, according to your logic, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost has ceased; and if so, you then declared to the bishop and all present, and before Almighty God, a most notorious untruth.

To satisfy yourself on this subject, namely, that the inspiration of the holy spirit may exist without the power of working miracles, I will refer you to the 12th chapter 1st Corinthians, and you will there see that the power to work miracles was but one gift of the spirit; but that there are in this chapter divers gifts mentioned, all by the same spirit. And permit me to ask you, how, as an honest man, you can read over the prayers of your own church from week to week, and from year to year, when the doctrine of divine inspiration is so plainly acknowledged in them. With your views how can you join in the morning service, and say, “take not thy holy spirit from us.” And in the evening service, beseech the Almighty to grant “true repentance, and his holy spirit.” If the reading over these most solemn prayers, by one who disbelieves the doctrine of divine inspiration is not a downright mockery of God, I do not know what is.

We are next told, that these “dissenters are in the practice of decrying, as though it were something criminal, all human learning, and vilifying and degrading all learned men.” Hence you proceed to prove, in your way, the advantages of learning, and when you have done, you have proved

proved your own weakness, in attempting to prove what no person disputes. So far are the main body of dissenters from decrying useful learning, and despising learned men, that I believe there is not a people under the heavens, that are more anxiously pursuing it. Sir, there are men among the different denominations of dissenters, of whom the world need never be ashamed, in point of learning; there are men among the dissenters, that I am acquainted with, with whom you, sir, swell as you may, can no more compare in matters of learning, than the blown up frog, in the fable, could compare with the ox. And as to the lower order of people, among the dissenters, we will venture a comparison of them with the lower order of the members of the established church. I am sure the means made use of by the members of the dissenting societies, for the instruction of their poor children, are equal to those of the established church. Indeed, both the one and the other, in that respect, are highly commendable, and worthy of every encouragement. But it is a constant sing song, and almost always in some people's mouths, "The dissenters are so very ignorant;" but pray, what are they ignorant of, in which others are so learned? Not more ignorant by nature, I presume, nor will it be contended, that they are more ignorant in the common affairs of life; that is in their trades or callings. It is then, I suppose, in matters of religion, that they are thought to be so very ignorant. Now, sir, take any given number, promiscuously, of dissenters, and take the same number promiscuously, of the members of the established church, (all being supposed members of

the established church, that are not excommunicated, or that do not belong to some dissenting society) and examine them, one by one, as to the knowledge of what they believe, what they experience, what they ought to practice, and the ground on which they hope to enjoy everlasting life. If you have not as rational and as pointed answers to all these interrogatories, from the members of the dissenting societies, as from the members of the established church ; then let the common sentiment concerning the ignorance of dissenters, remain in its full latitude ; but if otherwise, why should such an opinion be any longer indulged. There doubtless is, and probably always will be, a number of ignorant persons among dissenters ; but a less number, I presume, will not be found in the established church.

The methodists are next charged with the “ exclusion of the word of God from their public worship, whether on the Sunday or any other day of the week.” This, too, is said to be a “ proof of their self conceit.” You have Joseph Nightingale’s authority, that in public worship no “ part of scripture is ever read.” Then, sir, you should not have taken Joseph Nightingale’s authority, but should have enquired further into the matter. In all the large and principal towns in the kingdom, (such as London, Liverpool, Bristol, Manchester, &c.) and in many of the small ones, the lessons for the day, which are read in the established church, or some other portion of God’s word, is read every Sunday in the forenoon, when it is convenient for them to have preaching at that time ; but at very few places, I believe, in the afternoon ; nor do they think it necessary. But does it follow

from thence, that the methodists have rejected the blessed word of God as you seem to have inferred, or would have your readers to believe. No, sir: the methodists and dissenters in general love the word of God, read it, meditate upon it, treasure it up in their hearts, and endeavour to make it the rule of their life. The preachers exhort their hearers to read and to search the scriptures, according to our Lord's direction. They, continually, declare to their congregations in public, as well as in private, that the scriptures are to be our rule, and that they are the only sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice.

In describing, or attempting to describe, the flagrancy of this supposed crime, that the dissenters disregard the blessed word of God, you have wrought yourself up to a state of complete fury. I find you here (poor man) completely blinded in a cloud of dust which you have kicked up with your own feet.

Nothing surely can be so completely without any foundation in truth as what you have asserted concerning dissenters rejecting the sacred word of God, and substituting, at one time, the "boisterous rant of an ignorant, a sinful, a vain-glorious enthusiast;" and, at another time, "the baseless visions of the celebrated John Bunyan." "For, in their ungovernable rage for innovation, they have trodden under foot the holy, the sacred word of God, and have substituted in its place the word of John Bunyan, the word of an ignorant, a fallible, a sinful dreamer of dreams." Therefore, "O my soul come thou not into their secret, unto their assembly,

mine honour be not thou united." Thus, sir, you finish your extravagant and enthusiastical rant, and, indeed, it is full time you did; for if you had written much more to your learned friend A. B. C, on this subject, he certainly would have had some occasion to have taken you again under his more immediate care.

I think, sir, I may venture to leave the concluding part of this letter unanswered, as I am satisfied that no man in his sober senses will ever believe it. Did you, sir, ever hear John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress substituted in the place of God's holy word, did you ever know it taken for a text, or a lecture given from any part of it? did your friends ever tell you that they had been at a methodist chapel, or to any other dissenting chapel, where they had heard a sermon or lecture given from a passage in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress? I dare say you never did. I have attended meeting houses for twenty years past, but never heard of such a thing before I saw your letters. John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, has doubtless been read by thousands, with much pleasure and profit, both among dissenters and among the members of the established church, and will continue to be read, sir, when your letters are descended into obscurity, from whence they ought never to have arisen.

And now, sir, permit me to give you a word of advice, and that is never to meddle any more with the methodists or any other denomination of dissenters; for if those letters are a fair sample of your talents and information, you will only expose yourself to laughter and ridicule. No man surely ever committed himself more by writing than you have done, on almost every

every subject which your letters contain. They are principally composed of bitter invectives, gross misrepresentation, downright falsehood, and bad reasoning. I assure you, sir, we have a sufficient number of what you term "boy preachers, taylors, shoemakers, weavers, &c." that are every way competent to detect your glaring errors and inconsistencies, and to correct them too.

You may rest assured, sir, that the methodists will never meddle with you, if you will only let them alone. It is not their business to oppose the regular clergy, (respecting many of whom they have the highest opinion, and hear with the greatest pleasure at all opportunities,) but to oppose sin, wherever they find it. They wish to go quietly on their way, and desire as much as in them is, to live peaceably with all men.— But, sir, while they see it their duty to love God, to honour the king, and to live peaceably with all men, they also see it their duty to labour, at least, to do all the good they possibly can to their fellow-creatures, by turning as many as possible from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. In this labour of love, they desire to be found more incessant and more successful. And I trust, you, sir, will henceforth wish them good speed ; for although I cannot think well of your present work, I am inclined to give you credit for your good intentions. And if they really are good, it is an additional proof, that the best intentions, and the worst performances, are often very closely united.

Most fervently wishing and praying, that pure religion, which is no other than the love of God, and the love of man,

may

may increase more and more, both in the established church, and among dissenters of every denomination.

I am, rev. sir,

your most obedient, humble servant,

Wm. MAWER.

LINCOLN, June 16, 1810.

P. S. I most sincerely wish and earnestly hope, that your production will have the strictest justice done to it by the Reviewers: and that, as it is composed both of "body and soul," it will not be murdered by them; but escape at least with its life out of their hands.

FINIS.



